



Newsletter No. 6.

JANUARY, 1981.

To Encourage You...

One of the most encouraging of initiatives in the present Call to Commitment is the decision to promote a "book of the year". The idea in itself is not new - in the States Southern Baptists devote every January to studying a book of the Bible together. Now English Baptists are being asked to study together 1 Peter - sometime in the period between January and Easter 1981. I trust that we shall rise to the challenge and discover the strength of togetherness.

But why 1 Peter? 1 Peter initially came to mind because of its brevity - it is so much easier to treat in a comparatively short space of time than a Gospel or a Major Prophet. However, we quickly realised that there were other factors in its favour: it speaks more directly to our situation than, for instance, Galatians or Hebrews; it is warm in spirit and commends itself more immediately to most people. To cap it all, after the decision was made, we discovered that Scripture Union notes were featuring 1 Peter this spring - a providential sign, if any!

Peter wrote his first letter to encourage a group of "Turkish" (1.1) churches: "I want to encourage you and give my testimony that this is the true grace of God. Stand firm in it" (5.12). They needed encouragement - for Nero was on the throne! Our situation is very different - and yet we too need encouragement, not least in some of the very issues with which Peter deals. We need to be encouraged:-

1. TO FACE DEATH (1.1-12).

In spite of all the advances in medical science, death still has a sting. Rousseau's maxim that "he who pretends to face death without fear is a liar" is probably truer today than ever it was. As Christians we need to be encouraged to think through what it means to be filled "with a living hope".

2. TO LIVE HOLY LIVES (1.13-25).

Holiness is no longer the "in"-thing. In evangelical circles today all the emphasis is on experience. But as John Stott (Essentials for Tomorrow's Christians 9) reminds us: "Experience is good, but holiness is better. For holiness is Christlikeness and Christlikeness is God's eternal purpose for his children" (Romans 8.29). We need to be encouraged to "be holy in all that we do".

3. TO LIVE OUR LIFE TOGETHER (2.1-10).

Baptists are by nature individualists. The very act of believers baptism emphasises the need for a personal decision. However, Scripture teaches quite plainly that when a man is born again, he is born into the family of God. As Baptists we need to explore what this means. We need to "let our lives be used in building" - for God doesn't want a pile of bricks, he wants a temple.

4. TO LIVE ATTRACTIVE LIVES (2.11-3.7).

To use the old cliché, "Christianity is best caught and not taught"! The most effective evangelism is often more a matter of deeds rather than words. We need to be encouraged to work out a positive Christian lifestyle - in the community, at work, and above all in the home - so that our "conduct will win them over".

5. TO DEAL CONSTRUCTIVELY WITH SUFFERING (3.8-4.19).

Here is the nub of the Epistle. Nero is no longer on the throne - and yet there are still many in our churches who because of their faith in Christ have their backs against the wall. "If any one of you suffers...", writes Peter. We need to be encouraged to make Jesus Lord - whatever the cost.

6. TO SERVE (5.1-14).

"A Christian man is the most free lord of all and subject to none", wrote Martin Luther at the beginning of his treatise On the Freedom of a Christian Man. However, in the very next sentence he went on to say: "A Christian man is a most dutiful servant of all and subject to all". We need to be encouraged to "work from a real desire to serve".

Have I encouraged you to study together 1 Peter this spring? To encourage you in your study the Bible Society has produced a very attractive study booklet on 1 Peter under this very heading of To Encourage You... The author encourages you to buy it with a clear conscience - he gets no commission!

May you be encouraged in your life together.

Paul Beasley-Murray.

University Baptist Churches

A number of letters were received as a result of last September's editorial. The most thought-provoking was received from a university lecturer, whose name we withhold in order to avoid the identification of the churches concerned. It reads as follows:-

"Dear Sir,

I confirm what was written in your editorial of September about students from Baptist churches at Universities. I have been a university teacher for 18 years, and have been a member of two Baptist churches in my university city, for three of those as church secretary. Only a relatively small number of students have worshipped at those churches in that time. Most flock with their fellow-Christian students to one or two Anglican churches in the city. This is disturbing for the future of trained leadership in the denomination.

I do not believe that the answer to this lies in trying to bolster up the Baptist Student Societies, nor in the appointment of Baptist chaplains. Such narrow sectarianism would be alien to the Gospel and also to the whole university environment. Baptist students have a great deal to contribute to the interdenominational Christian Unions, as well as to receive from them and the Christian witness in the universities needs Baptist students to be taking a full part in the centre of that witness. Also, Christian students of other denominations need the fellowship and stimulus that Baptist students bring.

I confirm Paul Beasley-Murray's contention that the preaching in the evangelical Anglican churches in our university cities is, by and large, of a far higher standard, and the worship more alive, than that in the Baptist churches. What our Christian students need is a systematic, Biblical ministry, and they will go where that is provided, whatever the label. The only answer for our denomination that has any chance of success is to provide such ministry in our university towns, not just for Baptist students, but also for the general student body, as well as for non-students in the congregations.

This raises a number of problems that may have no solution.

(1) How do you persuade autonomous, sometimes tradition-ridden, local churches (Baptist with a capital 'B'!) to call men to their pulpits who can exercise such a ministry?

(2) Are our denominational leaders willing and able to do such persuading?

(3) Are there men in our denomination who can exercise such a ministry?

For be sure of this; if nothing is done about this, then, from a human point of view, it looks as though there will be no such men in a few years' time. I find it distressing that, already, Baptists are often conspicuous by their absence in interdenominational evangelical witness. And how many evangelical Christian books, scholarly or otherwise, are written by Baptists?

I am profoundly pessimistic about the future of our denomination as part of the evangelical voice in this country. I myself have finally felt it necessary to resign my membership of a Baptist church that has taken a sudden lurch to the insane end of the charismatic spectrum and to join large numbers of Baptist students worshipping in an evangelical Anglican church. I do not like the doctrine of infant baptism, I put up with the liturgy, I do not like the suggestion that the clergyman is exercising a priestly ministry (a suggestion not unknown in Baptist churches!), but I have finally decided to put up with these things for the chance to hear the Word of God systematically expounded in an intelligent, lively and relevant way. That is what our students need above all. Can we say that they are wrong to go where they can find it?"

An open letter to Paul Fiddes on "Charismatic Renewal"

"Dear Paul,

May I congratulate you and thank you for some very stimulating writing in your booklet 'Charismatic Renewal'. In compressed form and short compass it seems to me that you have said things, especially about natural abilities and spiritual gifts, about charisma and office, and about baptism in water and Spirit, that would if widely digested move the whole church forward from the impasse of some current debates. All of us involved in charismatic renewal need to wrestle very seriously with what you have said, and this letter is the first-fruits of my own wrestling.

It is a pity, of course, that your excellent essay should necessarily be bound up with a denominational report that amply fulfills all one's expectations. No bouquets for this part at all. An air of detachment hangs over it as if it were life on Mars that was being discussed rather than the living or dying of our churches. There is no evidence that anyone on the committee has ever experienced charismatic fellowship, gifts or worship, or ever wants to. Of every aspect the group notes cause for gladness and some bad effects or bad examples in some places.

The only place where the group speak of their own beliefs is where they affirm their faith in the Church Meeting. It seems a funny thing to be so sure of when all else is fluid. The group notes the real gains in church unity which the charismatic movement has brought and how this has not increased support for ecumenical institutions, without appearing to be able to draw the obvious conclusions about such institutions. What anyone who heard that a body of churchmen were investigating a new movement would want to know is, 'Is this of God?'. The group not only has not answered this question; it doesn't appear to have asked it. As a contribution to the charismatic debate the report does little to enhance what you say later about the local churches needing to listen to the wider church, and much to explain why they don't.

Turning to your own essay with relief and joy, I find most illuminating what you say about natural abilities being the place where a divine action of giving occurs. Since there is a natural base for every spiritual gift we must always ask, 'What is the Holy Spirit doing with these happenings?'. But don't you think Dunn's insight that charismata are events not abilities inhering in people can be taken too far? After all Paul does say "having gifts that differ" (Romans 12.6) and the whole context does seem to expect some consistent linking of gifts and people.

Similarly, I have nothing but agreement with what you say about the person who has a firm grasp of the structures of worship being able to give most liberty to the Spirit. Only let us be sure that it is we who grasp the structures and not the structures that grasp us.

Wise words are said about differences of taste and temperament giving opportunity for the exercise of Christian love and humility, and about the need not to exclude others. Paul's critique of the fellowship at Corinth could certainly describe some churches today where new ways are being tried: 'each one goes ahead with his own meal'. But perhaps we need to reflect more on the gap between what we are saying in our worship and how we are behaving when the latter is measured by the normal modes of expression in the society in which we live. An hour or two's viewing to live TV will show that triumph, joy and unity are commonly expressed in our culture by raised arms, hand clapping and embracing. Why so many people find our worship unreal is that they see us singing words of ecstatic triumph and looking bored to bits.

The next three sections must be taken together, those on Gifts and Offices, the Church Meeting and Submission. I like so much what you say about the scriptural basis of the ordained ministry, the need for the elders to exercise control over charismata in the fellowship, and for the minister to represent the wider church to the local church, an idea that preserves all that was true in the idea of apostolic succession. It is in the area of submission that I don't feel you have heard fully what the charismatic movement is saying. Clearly this is the part of it that caused the committee most concern too, and I don't think that is an accident, for two reasons.

The movement for charismatic renewal is fundamentally a movement for radical obedience. Where people in renewal have themselves failed to see this the gifts have been withdrawn and the renewal has petered out. Submission is very basic to the New Testament. Jesus, after all, is Lord, and the apostles style themselves as his slaves. The freedom for which Christ has set us free is freedom to render the perfect obedience that the Son gave to the Father. The cross is self-denial. In keeping with this the tone of Paul's letters is authoritative. As a man under authority he speaks with authority and calls men to the obedience of faith. Because submission to God is worked out in submission to those whom God has appointed, believers are urged to obey their leaders in the church,

to submit to the authorities, and to be subject to one another within God's order for the family. Loveless exercise of authority is explicitly condemned, but the principle of submission is affirmed.

In contrast to this our churches too often evince a spirit of rebellion and arrogance. 'Nobody is going to tell me what to do', is often the sentiment uniting believers in a church. The note of repentance is not often heard in our churches; we think it is something sinners do when they are converted, not something that you or I might be summoned to on Sunday morning. A discussion of worship among baptists very rapidly becomes a discussion of 'what I like'. Rightly are we called 'Free Churches', and if we do not repent it could be the death of us (and has been for many!). All movements for renewal are movements for holiness and call us to submit our minds to God's truth, our lives to God's laws, and our hearts to God's promises.

It is against this background that we must understand the collapse of our church meetings, and the ineffectiveness of Association and Union assemblies. Quite simply these bodies in many places have no credible authority because they do not appear to be under authority. Where the church meeting has been forsaken by baptists it is because of its worldliness. Its adherence to 'normal business procedures' has quenched the Spirit. Its so-called 'democracy' has forbidden prophecy. I don't believe that submission has usually been urged in response to charismatic utterances, as such. It is rather that a hunger for God is prompting a new submission to scripture, a new awareness of the role of leaders in the New Testament churches. Nor must we ignore the widespread feeling that our society is being destroyed for lack of respect for authority of all kinds such as the Bible everywhere enjoins. People have turned to God's Kingdom precisely because it is a Kingdom and not the dictatorship or anarchy of majority rule. When they see the intelligentsia of the church dismissing what the New Testament says as culturally conditioned whenever it runs counter to the best liberal thought of the day, they are not impressed.

I haven't said anything about your last section, the one on Baptism in water and Spirit. I think it's excellent. The idea that the controversy between those who want to locate the giving of the Spirit in conversion and those who look to a separate baptism of the Spirit could be resolved by assigning greater importance to believer's baptism, and seeing this as the normal point of reception is very attractive. But, of course, it will never be this tidy. There will always be people who pass through all our schemes and systems, all our prayers and sacraments, only later to enter the experience of release and renewal that the Holy Spirit gives. By whatever name it is known they will need to receive it, and when they do we shall surely lay hands on them, for that is another appointed rendezvous of the believer with his Beloved.

Every blessing (no, I mean it!),

Alastair."

(Alastair Campbell is Minister of Broadmead, Northampton. Paul Fiddes is on the staff of Regents Park College, Oxford and is the author of Charismatic Renewal. A Baptist View published by Baptist Publications, 4 Southampton Row, London WC1B 4AB - price 75p.)

Reflections on the present state of Baptist Church Growth

What a different situation we are in today than we were in five years ago. Then most of us were unthinking in our acceptance of the situation of decline. Those who did think about the situation were often given over to pessimism or cynicism. Today, however, there is a mood of confidence and whilst, for many, the situation remains tough one cannot help but feel that our ministries are being conducted in an altogether different atmosphere.

The turning point seems to have been the Nottingham Assembly in 1977. It questioned the old attitude which allowed secularisation to continue its unresisted progress and began to consider fighting back. By the time Signs of Hope came to be published it seemed that change was in the air. As so often the mere concern for growth seemed to be influential in bringing growth about.

Recently the report published by the Nationwide Initiative in Evangelism, called Prospects for the Eighties, has confirmed the encouraging picture drawn by our own denominational report. Unlike all the other mainline denominations the Baptists show some evidence of growth. Although we are still losing members, we are apparently gaining new attenders. That is a cause for rejoicing.

Two notes of caution should be sounded. Firstly, the report is only concerned with four years (1975-1979) and it is unwise to predict too much on the basis of such a short period. Secondly, there is another reason to question the predictions which are made. Statisticians always seem to assume that a current trend will develop in a linear and unchanging direction, but it is now well established that the church does not grow (or decline) in this undeviating way. Church growth is a bit like a wave that builds up, reaches a climax and then quickly disappears again. The evidence suggests that most churches go frequently through a cycle of depression, activation, revival, deactivation and declension. This factor has significance for where we are now and it is a pity that it was not in some way built into the predictions made by the Nationwide Initiative in Evangelism. It would make the predictions for 1984 somewhat different.

In the light of recent reports five comments are worth making about the growth being experienced among Baptist churches.

1. Whilst we can rejoice in the growth we are experiencing we cannot and must not relax our vigilance or our evangelistic zeal. In the cycle mentioned above it is normal for churches to grow in attendance when they move out of their depression. The next phase is usually that many of those attenders become members. This is a phase we have yet to enter. It is good to know that we are creating a pool in which to fish for members, but here we need to erect a warning sign. Pools quickly become exhausted of fish and unless we keep replenishing them with fresh supplies of attenders, we shall soon not have the opportunity for membership growth. It is a constant temptation to stop being concerned with attendance growth in order to 'consolidate', but it is a temptation which we give into at our peril.
2. We really must examine our concept of church membership. We are told that we attract attenders but do not make members. Few ever question the assumption that it is members, as we understand it, that we should be making. Yet the symptoms of a dis-ease are fairly common at this point. For example, we complain about the poor attendance at church meetings and also about the items which crop up on the agenda. We have trouble persuading people to become members

because it seems often to be a purely administrative change of status to which we are inviting people. They would be loved and welcomed just as much if they remained non-members. The distinction between member and non-member is small. We have administrative problems with the concept e.g. members who because of age are not permitted to vote or members who vote but rarely come to church or members who long since have moved away and yet wish to remain on the role. Baptism and membership often seem to have little relationship.

Without wishing to judge on any of these particular issues, does it not indicate that maybe it is time we looked again at the concept of membership? After all our concept of membership is hardly demanded by Scripture and presumably therefore, we should exercise some thought and freedom in the matter. May it not be that instead of having a fixed membership role which it is an embarrassment to revise that we should have an annual covenant service involving all those who wish to be committed to the work of our particular local fellowship for the coming year?

3. John Briggs has suggested in Prospects for the Eighties that maybe our God-given privilege is to attract adherents, provide an opportunity for them to respond to the gospel and then presumably be content for them to move off and join another Christian congregation. We are therefore a staging post; a mission without being in the fullest sense a church. Is such a view of the church adequate and would we be content to accept such a role? Some certainly would argue that as long as the Kingdom of God is being advanced we should be prepared to let the current denominational structures die. Does not death produce a harvest?
4. A look at the age-range of people we attract is challenging. Young people and old people are over-represented when judged by the age groups in the civil population. Why is it that we are not so good at holding those in the middle, especially if they have the misfortune to be men? Part of the answer surely lies in the fact that we have well-thoughtout strategies for reaching both young and old and we have programmes which are appropriate to their needs. It is much harder to think through such a strategy for young marrieds and working people. But it is a challenge from which we dare not shrink. Perhaps the columns of the Mainstream Newsletter could be used to share strategies to reach the great middle ground.
5. We can derive encouragement from Gavin Reid's comments on the way in which "the more highly committed, gathered congregations which practice adult baptism are growing." He says, "Undoubtedly we must say that there is an attractiveness and a verve about the highly committed congregation. I am sure that the Holy Spirit is at work through these churches and that needs to be said first." Our understanding of the church is very significant in relation to whether the church will grow or not. Maybe on this point we have grounds for rejoicing in that our understanding of the church facilitates growth.

Even so the peril of all growth is pride and if we want the present encouraging trends to continue, rather than quickly evaporate in the speedy turn of the growth cycle, we must avoid self-confidence.

Derek J. Tidball,
(Baptist Minister & Tutor at the
London Bible College).

Ans dell Baptist Church, Lytham St. Annes

Lytham St. Annes, is a pleasant, prosperous and essentially middle-class town on the North Lancashire coast. It enjoys good facilities, a good community spirit and a good employment situation, with the Post Office Stocks and Bonds, British Aerospace, Guardian Royal Exchange and the Land Registry providing the bulk of the employment. In addition to an above-the-average number of retired people, the population contains many professional people, and young families. It is my belief that if an evangelical Baptist church cannot grow in an area like this, then it is unlikely to grow anywhere.

The sociological factors account, at least in part, for the rapid growth of the church from an active membership of about 80 in 1973 to one of about 240 in 1980. The low point in the church's history occurred in the mid 1960's when, isolated on the edge of the then town, congregations were rarely above 60. With the expansion of the town from that time onwards the church premises were surrounded by new estates. At about the same time the arrival of several evangelical families brought a new flavour to church life. In 1969 the arrival of Rev. W. A. D. Whyte as pastor introduced a strong evangelical preaching ministry under which others were added. During the four years of his ministry the church changed from a middle of the road Baptist church into one of strong evangelical emphasis and thrust. At the same time several members of the church were involved with a gospel group called 'Canaan' through which a nucleus of converted young people was gathered. The foundation of a healthy work was laid and from 1973 growth has continued. Within this context the following can be isolated as positive growth factors.

1. Warmth of fellowship: There is a genuine warmth of love and fellowship which time and time again has proved to be the church's cutting edge.
2. Committed workers: Men with a vision of what could and ought to be are at the heart of the church's life. There is a 'holy restlessness' which while thankful for the past, causes us to reach out to the future.
3. A willingness to hoist the sails: A hunger for God among many has led us to hoist the sails whenever it became evident that the wind of the Spirit was blowing. Progressively the church has become involved in charismatic renewal which has deepened the experience of many although not without alienating others.
4. A willingness to make structural change: The new wine has required some new wineskins. With some exceptions, the church has responded favourably to changes of structure initially in the area of budget (30% of income now goes to outside causes); evening worship, which has become more informal and open; music, modern music being used with the help of an able ministry group called 'Habitation', house-groups, eight of which now function with reasonable efficiency; leadership, the deacons having moved into more pastoral roles preparing the way for the appointment of elders; staff - two years ago the church appointed a sister home from a missionary teaching post as pastoral assistant and currently discussions are taking place concerning the call of an associate pastor.
5. A consistent desire to win the lost: Whereas some growth has taken place through 'transfer growth' the majority has been through conversion growth. Many channels of outreach have been employed - door-to-door work, open airs, coffee bars, guest services, leaflet distribution, concerts, street theatre, street questionnaires, children's missions and all have yielded some results.

Factors which limit growth are, of course, also to be found. I would isolate four, conscious of the fact that they reveal my own bias.

1. Lack of spirituality: In common with many Baptist churches we have in and outside of church membership those whose commitment is marginal and who are disturbed by the demands of a radical and Spirit-filled Christian lifestyle. In recent months some members of long-standing have withdrawn and joined other churches. Although the reasons given vary, my own perception is that as the level of commitment rises it becomes less easy to be lukewarm.
2. Resistance to change: This is where most of the heartaches have come from. The standing down of the choir became a leadership crisis; the inclusion of charismatic renewal into the life of the church has been the cause of criticism and opposition, all of which has meant that coping with tensions has transferred valuable energies from other things. Such resistance has come only from a minority whereas at another pole another minority has pressed for more change more quickly.
3. Shortage of mature leaders: The big problem remains in the church not how to win more, but how adequately to teach and train those who have been won. Existing leaders have worked hard and done well, but much remains undone. The conviction has been fashioned out of this experience that, at least in our context, the leadership base will determine the size of the church.
4. Inadequate nets: Looking back over the years one is disturbed by the number of people who have begun the race, but not continued it. In a sense one expects that, but in some cases at least, inadequate follow-up and pastoral care is to blame.

Such are the major factors, which, in the context of a church believing and preaching the Bible, have either encouraged or restricted growth. There is nothing in this, so far as I am aware, which is peculiar to Ansdell, although of course, each church has its own mood or character. There are many insights which we as a church have come to treasure, again none of which are startlingly new. We have come to believe that unless a church's spiritual foundations are right then the rest of the building cannot be sound. We stress strongly the understanding of membership as an entering into covenant relationship with one another, demanding of us loyalty and commitment. We have agreed to move towards an eldership, although the actual practice of doing so has proved to be harder than we expected. We seek to combine joy and freedom in worship with a real measure of dignity. We are currently recommitting ourselves to the whole missionary enterprise. We are seeing that our gospel is a radical gospel demanding a radical lifestyle. We are sustained by a vision of the church of Jesus Christ as a united, mature, people through whom God can shake the world and manifest his wisdom. We see great meaning in the idea of the Kingdom of God. We have come to see that preaching on its own is not enough; that Kerygma must be accompanied by didache, the patient teaching of new disciples on a one to one or group basis. We are seeing that within the next year we must reinstate the gift of administration, that we must revalue the place of the church meeting, that we must adequately affirm the place of our children in the church and in worship. We compare ourselves with other churches and realise that for us the task of building a New Testament church has only just begun; but we are coming to see that for us the important thing is not to struggle and strive to be something to which we have not yet attained, but resting in God and walking in love with one another to enjoy the adventure of being led by God into his future for us.

Nigel Wright.

Upper Beeding Baptist Church, West Sussex.

("Good News for Sussex", a partnership mission, October, 1980).

Upper Beeding is tucked behind the South Downs, four miles from the sea. If you sit in the right place in church you can gaze out at Chanctonbury Ring. The church began at the turn of the century in a farm kitchen, then a "tin mission" was built and 21 years ago a church was constituted and a new building erected. The membership has grown from 21 in 1959 to 119 today, the near villages house 10,000 people. We are a local community church, well known and appreciated for our family services, organisations and notable members.

In the Spring of 1979, we committed ourselves to a "partnership mission" along with 25 other Sussex churches, each inviting a team of American Baptists for a simultaneous week of mission. (1) The church has always had a name for being a caring people, but the atmosphere of church life has not been openly evangelistic. "Good News for Sussex" changed our approach. We began consciously to plan for growth, to work and pray for conversions and to expect God to work. A committee was formed which prayed and thought through strategy for mission in our context. Much of the benefit of this mission was a result of the early thoughts given by the Holy Spirit to this group.

We planned a year or more of evangelism with the mission as the focus. An evangelistic team came together, trained and went out to call by arrangement on church contacts. The first visit led to the salvation of a young mother and mainly through this work eleven people found Christ in the year before mission week. This visitation is the most significant change in our approach to evangelism. However, most members of the team are over-committed in church life, others who would like to join are too involved elsewhere so valuable opportunities are being lost.

Our locality groups took a course on personal witness in the Spring, encouraging each person to "think mission". (2) Where a clear consistent witness existed there was fruit in the local group, sadly the opposite was true also. We delivered five issues of an A4 litho-printed broadsheet to 2,700 homes. Written for the complete outsider, this "Good News Sheet" contained local news, cartoons and articles of interest with a clear gospel content. It has been so well received that it is likely to become a permanent production. At £30 an edition it means that the church must have a continuing commitment to reach the completely unchurched.

During the mission week the usual kind of events were combined with constant visitation. The most profitable visits were "planned visits"; one American and one local at a pre-arranged time with the known intention of sharing their faith. Of note was the concert when Richard Meyrick played the piano and spoke (3). Three hundred heard the gospel, many probably for the first time. Gospels were delivered door to door. We were very warmly received and the resulting list of 96 contacts consists of seekers and interested people.

We did in that week what would have taken us a year to do otherwise. I have a new discipleship class of four, others responded at various levels of faith. The mission continues. It has caused the church to change direction slightly. We have set the compass more carefully towards disciple making and growth. I sense that members see more clearly what we are really about week by week.

What of the Americans? They brought a freshness and joy in God that was a tonic to us all, although their gifts and thus their value varied. The "unknown quantity" factor led to some severe failures in events we arranged for them, but no damage was done to the cause of Christ. On the contrary we gained much from them, but six trained, gifted Baptists whom we KNEW from Grimsby or Gloucester would be as greatly used by God and easier to work with. In fact we have a team of eight here ready to work anywhere! My great memory of the Americans is the clarity of their gospel, so Christ-centred and him so available to the sinner.

So it has been a year and a half of great benefit to the church. It has resulted in a number of clear new Christians. Our failures reflect basic problems of the church; members not free for evangelistic work, administrative failure and the weakness of personal witness, but the blessings remind us that God has placed here a loving, caring people with great opportunities we must grasp for him. We long for the Lord Jesus to move us on to find better ways of making him known.

Chris Voke
Minister -
Upper Beeding Baptist Church.

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- (1) Sponsored jointly by Rev. Alan Pringle, 14 Brangwyn Ave., Brighton and Rev. Howard Baldwin, Director, Multi-Media Evangelism Inc., 7816 Surreywood Drive, Richmond, Virginia.
 - (2) "How to Evangelise the Jesus Way" - Ross Pilkington (Scripture Union).
 - (3) Richard Meyrick, (concert pianist) 35 St. James's Road, Gravesend, Kent, DA1 0HF.
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Moreton Baptist Church, Wirral, Merseyside.

I wonder how many pastors have felt like leaving the flock and looking for fairer pastures. That was certainly my feeling after being in Moreton (part of the Wirral Peninsular and now in the metropolitan county of Merseyside) for 3 years. It seemed to me that nobody cared about the work, providing I did my job properly. I am sure that this was a somewhat jaundiced view, but it wasn't without reasons. There had been the time when a Church Officer threatened that if I didn't stop a group of teenagers coming, then he would throw them out of the service! It was events like this that made me begin to think about packing my bags in search of better pastures.

In the middle of this mood of despair, God met with me in a deeper way and filled me with His Spirit. Later, through a word of prophecy, God encouraged me to look to Him and to stop dwelling on the problems of the pastorate. This brought a further measure of release in my own spirit, and it began to have an effect upon my ministry. People noticed the difference in my preaching and the Church responded with greater commitment and enthusiasm. Various individuals were filled with the Holy Spirit and it had a marked effect upon their lives. For a while we were sailing in clear, sunny waters, but it wasn't long before the storm clouds began gathering on the horizon.

I am not sure now what caused it although there were varying factors that played their part. I am even less sure that anything could have been done to avoid the storm. Certainly, part of the problem lay in the fact

that bit by bit the Holy Spirit was not only changing individuals, but the Church as well. It was amazing how non-conformists were so conformist. There were cries of: "We don't like these selfish people who want to praise God. Let them pray at a prayer-meeting before the service." A few scriptural choruses in adoration of God was greeted by some with stern faces.

Another factor which caused trouble was that those who had not been filled by the Spirit were looking critically at those who had - not without good reason I might add! Those who had been filled with the Spirit did not always produce that holy living which should have borne witness to the Spirit's activity. But what they failed to understand was that some of those who had been filled were among those who had the deepest spiritual and emotional needs. It was these needs which caused them to be amongst the first seeking the baptism in the Spirit. The trouble with the critical, undiscerning glance was that it began to drive people into opposing camps.

At that time another move was taking place; we were becoming more evangelical with regard to the Scriptures. For some, the changing emphasis on the Word of God being inspired by the Spirit, posed new problems. Then I believe there were reactions of fear, jealousy and sheer selfishness that demanded its own way rather than God's. Perhaps above all the new life which was being experienced by more and more was a threat to the comfortable complacency and deadness of some Christians.

Naturally, this was a pretty explosive situation, and regretably we have seen a few departures, but we have also seen remarkable progress. The freedom of worship is a delight to behold. Increasingly, the gifts of the Spirit are being exercised and various ministries are developing. Two elders have been appointed and one, in particular, is growing in the ministry of the Word. I don't have to shepherd all the flock; mature Christians are helping in the work - especially women to women which is so helpful. We have seen more conversions and baptisms this year, although this probably won't affect our statistics until next year. There is much more love being expressed in the fellowship with gifts (even cars) changing hands. Last year we allocated £4,000 to outside causes as we set aside 30% of our tithes and offerings - no special efforts.

As we view the past, we would have to say: "The Lord has done great things for us; we are glad". We don't imagine that we have reached perfection, but we are confident that He, who has begun a good work, will complete it.

Raymond Borlase.

How do Baptist Churches Grow.

At the 1980 Conference the three-hundred participants formed thirty groups to discuss ten questions from the Rev. Tom Houston. The questions called for the recognition of contemporary growth factors in our Baptist churches and probed problems related to leadership, constituency and change.

Each group was asked to summarise its discussion and present conclusions. These conclusions, roughly written on many pages, make interesting reading and provide much information on Baptist church growth. I have endeavoured to provide a brief summary, without comment, under the headings of Structures, Leaders and Members.

A. Structures

1. Worship in growing churches is participational, lively, attractive and attempts to combine charismatic and traditional elements. Many testified to the value of Family Services that minister to the whole family and attract a responsive 'fringe'.
2. Homes are being used for the development of a 'cell' structure to provide fellowship, pastoral care, life-related Bible study and prayer. The evangelistic use of the home, with special groups for enquirers, was also commended.
3. Variety in methods of evangelism was emphasised, but structured programmes of visitation and training, such as Evangelism Explosion, are proving very effective. Churches should take the initiative in visitation, be unafraid to 'preach for a verdict' and prayerfully set evangelistic goals.
4. Children's work that is related to a family ministry and is based upon new materials and activities is reaching many non-Christian children. Their parents are often open to a sensitive presentation of the Gospel.
5. Community serving structures such as old people's luncheon clubs, playgroups and coffee shops build bridges and create a context for effective ministry.
6. Discipleship classes, before and after baptism, with well-defined procedures and standards for church membership are considered essential to 'make disciples'.

B. Leaders

The conclusions contained the following recommendations for leaders:-

1. Leaders should have confidence in God to use them according to His anointing and enabling. They should be deeply committed to Christ and have a fervent desire for the growth of the church.
2. Leadership should be shared on the basis of an Agreed Agenda for the church and defined responsibilities and role for the Minister.
3. Leadership should be exercised in a firm and consistent manner with vision clearly communicated and goals prayerfully established.
4. Ministers should train leaders and encourage fellowship with and between them. All teaching and preaching should be biblical, simple and life-related.
5. Shared leadership is not only beneficial for the church, it also prevents a break in ministry when the Pastor leaves. Ministers are encouraged to remain in a pastorate long enough 'to do the job' and prepare the church for any interregnum, which should ideally be no longer than a year.
6. Change should be introduced sensitively and patiently, after careful research and with good communication. Leaders should be willing to begin with existing structures and strive to retain a sense of security and confidence in the membership.

7. Leaders should actively seek opportunities to relate to the community in service and witness. Where appropriate they should develop skills to use the local media.

C. Members

The conference made the following suggestions for Baptist church members:-

1. Members should be confident that God is able to use them according to the gifts He has given. As members of the body of Christ everyone must seek to identify their gifts and employ them in corporate 'body ministry'.
2. Commitment to Christ must result in a lifestyle that commends Christ and challenges the unbeliever. The community-life of the membership must be open, welcoming, accepting and compassionate.
3. Members should establish caring relationships with non-Christians and be prepared to share a natural and honest testimony of their knowledge and experience of Christ.
4. Members should be prayerful and expectant for people to be converted to Christ and the consequent growth of their church. They must be open to the changes that growth brings and renewal demands.
5. Members must be willing to accept and encourage the enthusiasm and service of new converts. The network of relationships of each convert may be pursued with sensitive and relevant evangelism.
6. Members should be trained to discover and develop their gifts to become more effective in ministry. They must be open to leadership responsibilities when suitable gifts and abilities are recognised.
7. Reasons for the greater proportion of female members in many churches include, the longevity of women; the two World Wars reduced the male population; an over-emphasis on ministry to children; women meet and mix more easily and Christianity is presented as unmanly. Among suggestions to correct the imbalance were: churches should minister to families and focus on fathers; men should be a major 'target' for evangelism; church programmes should be sensitive to male employment and leisure.

This brief summary cannot convey the wealth of testimony, counsel and practical example given by the participants at this session. This was one of the few occasions when a large group of Baptist Ministers and Leaders had the opportunity and excuse to tell their story and share their opinions. It was a profitable time with much to be learned about the promotion of life and growth in our churches. I believe it was a foretaste of more to come and look forward to the next Conference at Swanwick on the 19th-21st January, 1981.

Roy Pointer,
Church Growth Consultant,
Bible Society.

At your service - The Bible Society.

In 1979 Bible Society celebrated its 175th Anniversary with gratitude to God for all that has been achieved toward the "effective distribution of the Scriptures at home and overseas". In particular, the overseas dimension of the work has been tremendous growth. Today there are 59 independent National Societies working in 150 countries and grouped together in the United Bible Societies.

However, while the Society is deeply committed to the overseas work, we are also committed to the task in Great Britain. In fact, with other agencies, we are dedicated to arresting the decline in the British Church and have developed, and continue to develop, a wide range of materials and programmes for the re-evangelisation of these Islands.

Toward this end, the Society continues to provide a variety of Bibles in most of the major versions. We publish the Good News Bible which has rapidly established itself as a major popular translation. This version being particularly effective in reaching the non-Christian and for teaching the new Christian.

A wide selection of foreign language Bibles, gospels and portions are available for use among immigrants and foreign students. New selections are produced as the need arises, as for instance, Scriptures for the recently settled Vietnamese 'Boat People'.

In response to the increasing demand for Home Bible Study material the Society is producing a series of 'Exploring the Word' workbooks for Christians and a 'Step to Faith' series for use with non-Christians.

The needs of young and old, poor reader and non-reader, are provided for in Scripture Reading plans, cassettes, comics and children's books. For the imaginative there are Creative Bible Study Kits and leaflets for special occasions and festivals. Those who want to reach their neighbours with the Good News will find visitation materials and programmes with advice and counsel gathered from every size of distribution.

In addition to these and other materials, the Society offers Church Growth Courses that provide a minister and lay leaders with insights and resources to analyse their church and community in preparation for renewal and mission. Over 2000 attended these Courses in 1979 and we anticipate many more attending the 40-50 Courses already booked through the country in 1980.

If you believe the Society can help you in your work for Christ in the 1980's, please write for our free 'Catalogue of Bible Resources' to:

The Rev. Eddie Gibbs,
Church Programmes Manager,
The Bible Society,
146 Queen Victoria Street,
London, EC4V 4BX.

We exist to serve you, that together we might better serve our Lord and extend His Kingdom, 'at home and overseas'.

Roy H. Pointer,
Church Growth Consultant,
The Bible Society.

1981 Baptist Union Assembly 27th- 30th April

This year Mainstream are providing a service for all Assembly goers. We are to run a refreshment lounge at Westminster Chapel following the main sessions. Proceeds from this will go to the Home Mission Fund - Do call in, have a coffee, and meet your friends.

THE SECOND MAINSTREAM FRINGE MEETING promises to be an event not to be missed. It will be on Tuesday evening at the Central Hall, Westminster in the Library, beginning at 8.30p.m. The programme will include music and interviews plus much more.

A new departure in the assembly programme this year, is the "Assembly Celebration" at the first session, Monday afternoon. It will include an act of Communion led by our incoming President, Rev. Fred Wilson.

MAINSTREAM SECRETARY:

New address:-

Rev. David Coffey,
The Manse,
Furzehill Road,
Torquay, Devon, TQ1 3JG.
Phone: Torquay 27846.

NEWSLETTER EDITOR:

Rev. Dr. Paul Beasley-Murray,
43 Hale Road,
Altrincham.
Phone: 061 928 0372.

TREASURER:

Rev. Peter Grange,
The Manse,
Church Road,
Kirby Muxloe, Leicester, LE9 9AN.
Phone: 0533 393173.



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